

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Carmen Pajarillo, and I am a 5th year Yale medical student in New Haven, CT.

I stand in support of HB 6616 Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 26 regardless of immigration status. It is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 26; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals have access to health coverage.

Many of my premedical/public health endeavors prior to medical school focused on working with Hispanic/Latino populations, with many of my patients being undocumented. Here, I saw how barriers to healthcare such as lack of insurance detrimentally impact my patients' lives, often to the point of ruin. I remember as a physical therapist technician working with an undocumented/uninsured patient whose landlord took advantage of their documentation status and refused to fix leaking pipes in their apartment. When the patient subsequently slipped and fell down the stairs, severely fracturing their arm, they did not go to the hospital out of fear of the cost. By the time they sought medical treatment, their arm had healed improperly and required several expensive surgeries. Worse yet, the patient had lost their job due to this injury.

Unfortunately, this story is not unique. As a medical student now living in CT, I have worked with many immigrant patients who share similar stories of how these systemic failures have negatively impacted these lives. It is devastating to watch my cardiology attendings prescribe life-saving medications in the hospital, only to discover that the generic medication brand is still too expensive for our patients to afford. While on my plastics rotation, I remember having patients with incredibly time-sensitive hand injuries delay seeking medical care due to their lack of insurance, thereby increasing their risk for permanent damage and lifelong unemployment.

The system has failed these patients in many ways, but through HB 6616 we can start reversing one of them: lack of insurance. By expanding HUSKY access up to age 26, we can provide undocumented/immigrant patients the healthcare they need and deserve. Moreover, we can reduce healthcare costs by adopting a preventative approach: by integrating patients into the healthcare system at earlier ages, we can set them up for healthier lives and treat health issues before they spiral out of control. It is healthier and more cost-effective to treat a patient's high blood pressure than it is to treat the resulting heart attack or stroke. Likewise, HPV immunizations are life-saving and cheaper to implement than it is to treat cervical cancer. As I get closer to becoming a licensed physician, I think of the care I want to provide my future patients, and how I can help them. Through HB 6616, I will be able to better support my future patients and improve their quality of life.

I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all community members in CT regardless of age or status.

Thank you for your time,

Carmen Pajarillo, MPH | Yale School of Medicine